

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

DIVISION OF STATEWIDE PLANNING

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Tom Hawkins
Sr. Vice President and CEO
Bristol Bay Native Corporation
P.O. Box 100220
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Dear Mr. Hawkins:



Thank you for your letter concerning your general view that the effort to formulate a regional transportation plan for Southwest Alaska has not fairly and fully considered all sub-areas within the region. Since the arrival of your letter, and several others making a similar point we have slowed the planning process down and will offer such communities a more thorough chance for consideration.

Specifically, with your assistance, we will be presenting the plan's status at the December meeting of the BBNC. There has also been time set up after the formal meeting for communities to voice their concerns face-to-face. In addition, we have tasked the consultant to slow down, revisit these issues and take into account many of the project ideas and increased public participation mentioned by you and others.

It was not our intention to leave any area of the region out of the planning process, nor to rely on the organized boroughs to "drive" which projects were included. Over the last year, we have in fact been mostly gathering data and exploring innovative ways with which to enhance transportation "regionalism." This, we feel, is the component of this planning process that makes it different from past efforts. We want this process to help unify the region leadership behind a shared concept of what the regional transportation system ought to be, rather than individually asking for projects that compete with one another.

We admittedly have not been as aggressive as we would have liked in our Southwest Plan public involvement over the last year. Additionally, the personnel changes at SWAMC staff resulted in some loss of continuity with our use of that forum as a means to bring members of our plan advisory committee together. As most agencies in state government, we have limited resources and staff at our disposal. Our efforts in the winter and spring of 1999 were concentrated on completing the regional transportation plan for Southeast Alaska. We hope to resurrect communication and interest in the Southwest Alaska Transportation Plan with a renewed public outreach effort over the next few months. We appreciate your candid assessment and will strive to do better in this area.

Nevertheless, we feel you might have missed some things the plan is addressing. A particular element of the preliminary alternatives package which applies almost exclusively to the Unorganized Borough villages is the commitment to improving and maintaining winter trail markings. Nor have we forgotten the road work to Aleknagik nor the planned bridge. In fact, the plan deliberately considered these


projects already in the delivery pipeline, thus not needing to be slowed down or reevaluated. I think you can see that slowing down such projects in order to make them face a new decision-making process would have been the more disruptive scenario. The “underserved links” we originally tackled in the planning process included a number of options for ferry service specifically for villages in the Unorganized Borough. However, issues of service, weather, ridership and cost combined to make such options impractical from the state’s standpoint, and they have not been advanced in the preliminary alternatives technical memorandum.

I would also like to respond to the points made on the second page of your letter:

- Improve participation process – yes, we will make further outreach such as the already planned December meeting. We are also willing to come to other venues, when invited.
- Intra-village roads and road improvements – our area planning process has generally avoided looking at intra-village road needs, and focused on inter-village needs and region-wide synergies. I hope to continue this distinction in our area plans, though others within DOT&PF are working on the intra-village needs on a routine basis. Jack Melton of the Central Region planning staff (907-269-0509) remains DOT&PF’s primary contact for intra-community projects in Southwest Alaska.
- Improvements to airports -we have specifically tasked the consultant to use the recently created airport needs identification model prepared for the Y-K delta region. This model is a marked improvement on identifying where and when wider and longer runways make economic sense.
- Inter-village roads – Yes, we hope to expand our list of such needed improvements and give them a fair chance in the evaluation process.
- Identify and include partnerships – This is an implementation issue, and will be addressed, in part, in the plan. But yes, in concept, the department is very supportive of such partnering to achieve needed transportation. At a recent meeting of the Alaska Miners Association I made the following point: “Federal law now permits more partnering and public-private ventures than state government is probably comfortable with. The challenge is upon us to become more flexible.” I think this statement supports your point, and our recognition that such partnerships are possible and beneficial.

At this time no official recommendations or decisions have been made, in draft or final form. I believe you will see us slow down, take more time for input, and formulate a thorough plan that fulfills regional expectations. I thank you for taking the time to write and look forward to continuing the dialog.

Sincerely,



Jeff Ottesen, AICP
Chief, Statewide Planning